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AUTHOR Jackson, Cynthia L.
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ABSTRACT

This brief contains information on the status of laboratory schools in Florida, as well as information on laboratory schools in general. The brief is organized into five sections: (1) Introduction; (2) Historical Perspective of Laboratory Schools; (3) Status of Laboratory Schools in Florida; (4) Factors Associated with Successful Laboratory Schools; and (5) Laboratory School at the University of North Florida--Is It Feasible? The brief was written to raise issues that should be considered in determining the feasibility of a laboratory school in a given community. Issues that are raised include the mission, role, and function of the laboratory school for the community it serves and in the institution in which it is housed. (Author)

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STATUS OF LABORATORY SCHOOLS

Prepared by
Cynthia L. Jackson
Supervisor, Instructional Analysis
Duval County (Florida) Public Schools

for
Florida Institute of Education
University of North Florida
Jacksonville, Florida

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STATUS OF LABORATORY SCHOOLS

I. INTRODUCTION

This status brief on laboratory schools contains information to assist with determining the feasibility of a laboratory school at the University of North Florida.

The brief is organized into five sections. The introductory section is an overview of the organization of the remainder of the report.

Section two contains a historical perspective of laboratory schools nationally. This section focuses on factors contributing to the declining number of laboratory schools and the common difficulties and hazards facing laboratory schools.

Section three is a summary of the status of laboratory schools in Florida.

Section four contains a summary of factors that are associated with successful laboratory schools.

In section five the information in the brief is summarized through a listing of questions that would aid in determining the feasibility of a laboratory school at the University of North Florida.

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF LABORATORY SCHOOLS

Historically, the role of the laboratory school was to provide facilities for training new teachers. In 1959, 252 laboratory schools existed in the United States. By 1983, the number of laboratory schools decreased to 87.

Reason For The Decrease

Four factors are cited as primary reasons for the decline in the number of laboratory schools. First, the cost of operating laboratory schools is prohibitive. Many institutions find more profitable and less costly means of providing teacher education. One example is contracts with public school systems.

Second, a disjunction between the mission of the laboratory school and its parent institution's mission can create problems. Edward Bass, former President of the National Association of Laboratory Schools, cites the following example. "A laboratory schools whose administration views its purpose as teacher training will find survival difficult in an institution whose college of education is research oriented."

Third, the research value is questionable when the composition of the student population of the laboratory school is not representative of the general population. A concern then exist regarding the generalizability of research findings. Most laboratory schools are viewed as schools for the elite, with the student population composed of children of professors and other professionals, as well as, receiving preferential treatment.

Finally, problems exist in attracting and retaining teachers and administrators who are willing to work "in a fish bowl" environment, as well as receive wages below those of local districts.

Vulnerbility Of Laboratory Schools

The existence and status of schools still operating are vulnerable. One reason for the vulnerability is the issue of functions. Laboratory schools are considered to have six functions: educate the children enrolled in the school; develop innovative practices and techniques in an experimental environment; conduct research and develop educational theory; prepare new teachers; provide inservice training; and disseminate innovations and theories through various media. These functions are not necessarily incompatible. Yet, they are perceived as incompatible when there is no consensus on the priority of the functions and when the laboratory school administrator is unable to orchestrate harmony among them during implementation.

A second reason for these schools' vulnerability, and closely related to the first, is the varying opinions on the value of laboratory schools in relation to their functions. Conflict develops when laboratory school faculty and college faculty place varying emphasis on the schools' functions.

Finally, the strength of the external and internal support for the laboratory school is crucial in making its status and existence stable. Administrative and teaching staff of the laboratory school and college administrators and faculty must be in accord in understanding and carrying out programs that are in keeping with the mutually agreed upon mission and functions of the laboratory school. Parent institution's administration and board need to demonstrate their support by providing appropriate funding which enables fulfillment of the purpose and mission, as well as, providing an environment that fosters the success of individuals associated with the school. One ultimate purpose of laboratory school should be to produce products that benefit local school districts. Therefore, external support also includes a clearly defined, receptive, and

cooperative relationship between the laboratory school and the local school districts.

III. STATUS LABORATORY SCHOOL IN FLORIDA

Eight laboratory schools operate in Florida. Four of the schools are under the State University System in Florida. These schools are: 1) P. K. Yonge, University of Florida; 2) The Henderson School, Florida Atlantic University; 3) Florida A & M University High School, Florida A & M University; and 4) Development Research School, Florida State University.

Broward County School District operates four Nova Schools. These schools are: Blanche Forman Elementary, Eisenhower Elementary, Nova Middle School, and Nova High School.

This section contains a summary of the status of the laboratory schools in Florida.

State University System Schools

The four State operated laboratory schools have been evaluated over the past sixteen years. An excerpt of the recommendations made by the recent State University System Education Program Review Team suggests that although the laboratory schools have potential for addressing school renewal, their missions still lack translation into effective operational programs, and their relationships with parent colleges of educations and surrounding school systems remain unclear. Two tasks are identified in the recommendaitons. One task is deriving useful missions for the laboratory schools; the other is implementing those missions. The former task is much easier to accomplish than the latter. But the latter is the most critical. It was concluded that, if useful missions cannot be developed and implemented, then consideration should be given to discontinuing the laboratory schools.

Currently, the Florida House of Representatives Developmental Research Oversight Group is conducting a study of the Four Developmental and Research Schools (laboratory schools) in the State University System. Chaired by Representative Al Lawson, the group held its first hearing in September 1985. The discussion included the following twelve issues.

1. Roles - The roles of Developmental and Research Schools should include having exemplary school programs, field testing new state policies and innovative practices, and disseminating information to public schools and teachers in Florida.

2. Responsibilities - Additional responsibilities for research, development and dissemination in the Developmental and Research School programs are needed. These additional responsibilities should not increase faculty time.
3. Governance - Governance within the university structure is nebulous and institutional priorities exclude Developmental Research Schools.
4. Standards - One Developmental Research School is below standard in many respects and it does not conform to its assigned role as an exemplary school.
5. Relationships - Colleges of education should have a strong organizational relationship with Developmental and Research Schools.
6. Funding - Developmental and Research Schools are funded at a level below district schools and teacher salaries are not competitive with local school districts.
7. Facilities - Developmental and Research Schools at Florida A & M University and Florida State University are overcrowded.
8. Equipment - OCO Funds have been low for the past several years. Equipment replacement lags far behind the need.
9. Staffing - Developmental and Research School directors and principals serve many functions of a county school superintendent, in addition to those required of school principals. These schools' salary rates are often below teacher salaries, which are contrary to regional accreditation standards.
10. Special Groups - Exceptional students are not being served through Developmental and Research Schools. Funding at weighted FEFP rates has not been implemented in Developmental and Research Schools in the same manner as in the school districts. Developmental and Research Schools cannot serve exceptional students on unweighted funding.
11. Improvement - Targeted funding is needed either through the Board of Regent's budget or through establishing a 68th school district for improvement of Developmental

and Research Schools.

12. Future - The future of Developmental and Research Schools is uncertain. The uncertainly causes employee unrest and faculty are not making long term commitments.

The Nova Schools-Broward County School District

The Broward County School Board opened the Nova Schools in 1963 for the purpose of developing and perfecting exemplary and innovative practices and techniques for dissemination. Serving as research and development centers in the Broward County School District, the Nova Schools were to achieve its purpose through experimentation.

The Schools enjoyed several years of national attention. Yet, as funding decreased so did the enthusiasm for the Schools to be innovative and an educational change agent. As a result, concern of the function and role of the Nova Schools began to occur.

The Schools still functions but remain controversial. Reasons for the controversy include their ability to maintain the research and development purpose; and the Schools' relationship with other schools in the district.

In a recent evaluation of the Schools by the Florida Institute of Education it was recommended that the schools remain open, but not as research and evaluation centers. Three alternative functions were suggested:

1. Training facilities for new teachers. - In an attempt to meet the needs and interests of Florida's Beginning Teacher Program the Nova Schools could provide an environment where it is possible to identify effective and ineffective teachers early.
2. Magnet schools. - The Nova Schools rank among the highest in the district in academic achievement. It seems reasonable to assume that their programs are of sufficiently high quality for meeting the special needs of academically talented students.
3. Models of effective schools. - The Nova Schools appear to possess the characteristics normally associated with effective schools: effective leadership, pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus, continuity to teaching staff, an orderly and safe environment, high expectations, and measures of student achievement as the basis for program evaluation. The schools could be viewed as exemplary in this manner.

IV. FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUCCESSFUL LABORATORY SCHOOLS

This section contains a summary of selected literature on success factors associated with laboratory schools. The order of the success factors does not suggest a hierarchy. Balance among all of the factors is required.

1. Laboratory schools must be established as a service center for a stated population. This role must be earned and enhanced through positive response to area needs and subsequent development and dissemination of successful products.
2. Laboratory schools must be established, maintained, and recognized as schools whose primary role and functions are to conduct research, encourage innovation, develop and disseminate products, procedures and ideas, and provide services which will enhance area instructional programs and student learning. While these schools carry an obligations to provide excellent and stimulating educational programs for pupils enrolled, this is true because those obligations are primary in their mission.
3. Laboratory schools must enroll student populations which are typical and representative of the area they serve. When this is not the case, and enrollments reflect or have the reputation of elitism, the schools lose credibility with their constituents and the resulting stigmas consume their role and their ability to be effective educational change agents.
4. Laboratory schools must have reduced pupil, teacher ratios. Limitations on teaching loads permits the development of expectations for faculty research and development. Research and Development productivity should be an integral part of the overall professional load for both faculty and administrators.
5. Laboratory schools must be staffed with highly qualified faculty and administrators who are excellent teachers. Yet, these qualifications are not enough. The staff must have exceptional professional energy and zeal, be knowledgeable and creative, have excellent communication skills, and a positive self-concept which will enable them to be open, to share, and to serve as leaders in the conduct

of the school mission.

6. Laboratory schools must accept and provide for research and development leadership from within the school faculty and administration. This function can be enhanced through the appointment of department or unit leaders in the school. These leaders must merit such appointments through their professional knowledge, knowledge in their subject or area of instruction, teaching competence, and leadership ability.
7. Laboratory schools must provide ways of recognizing and rewarding faculty and administrators for the level of their commitment and the quality of their contribution and productivity as partners in the overall mission of the school. This can be accomplished in ways other than increasing salaries to inappropriate levels within the constituent area.
8. Laboratory schools must support and encourage the ongoing professional development of faculty and administrators. This can be accomplished in a number of ways including: district inservice programs; collaborative relationships with colleges and universities and with other laboratory schools; faculty membership and participation in professional speciality associations (i.e., presentations at professional meetings and publications in professional journals); provide faculty the opportunity to serve their constituents as consultants, demonstration teachers and presenters; encourage individual graduate and advance graduate study; and recognize within the community the roles and successes of the laboratory school and its faculty through appropriate information and publicity.
9. Laboratory schools must receive special recognition and support from the administration and board which constituted them and provided their charge. Part of this recognition must be the provision of appropriate funding which will enable them to fulfill successfully their roles and mission, including: instructional aides, administrative assistance, secretarial/clerical staff, instructional and laboratory equipment, publication resources and facilities, research assistance and coordination, communications linkages and

relationships, travel support, and a clearly established hierarchy of operational and administrative roles and responsibilities that will provide a positive, nourishing environment for the successful performance of individuals affiliated with the school, as well as the school itself, as they strive to fulfill the mission.

V. LABORATORY SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA - IS IT FEASIBLE?

This educational brief on laboratory schools was prepared for two purposes. First, it summarizes information on the status of laboraotry schools nationally and in Florida. Second, it highlights issues on role, mission, operations, and staffing that directly effect the success or failure of such schools.

Based on the information contained in the brief, a list of questions are presented that are appropriate for determining the feasibility of a laboratory school at the University of North Florida.

The questions are divided into three broad categories of role, operations, and staffing. The categories nor the placement of the questions within the categories are mutually exclusive. The categories are used to provide the reader with a framework for conceptualizing salient areas for consideration.

Role

1. What would be the purpose of a laboratory school for this community?
2. What would be the appropriate mission of a laboratory school for this community?
3. In keeping with the purpose and mission of the laboratory school, what are the appropriate primary goals of the laboratory school? For example, is it best for the primary goal to be teacher training, research and development, or model of effective schools, to name a few.
4. Is the mission one that can be developed into a program that can be implemented and measured?
5. What is the appropriate composition of the student population for meeting the mission of the laboratory school?

Operations

1. Can appropriate funding levels for facilities, equipment,

and staffing be obtained and maintained?

2. Will the laboratory school be the jurisdiction of the university or the school district?
3. What is the appropriate selection process for identifying the student population?
4. What strategies should be used to measure the laboratory school's program and program implementation against its goals?

Staffing

1. What characteristics and experiences are desirable for the administrator and staff of the school?
2. What is the appropriate relationship between laboratory school staff and university faculty?
3. What is the appropriate relationship between laboratory school staff and school district staff?

The above listed questions should in no way be considered as inclusive of questions to be raised and answered regarding the feasibility of a laboratory school at the University of North Florida. They are presented to provide the reader with a starting point in questions to be asked.

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